

10 April 1984

CENTRAL AMERICA JENNINGS:  
/U.S. AID

Two aspects of the president's policy have now really angered members of Congress: the White House decision to challenge Nicaragua's right to take its case against the United States to the World Court and the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, allegedly with White House support and CIA direction. ABC's Anne Compton is on Capitol Hill.

COMPTON: CIA Director Casey knew when he arrived to brief senators he was walking into a virtual brick wall of opposition over Nicaragua. Casey had received a letter obtained by ABC News from Barry Goldwater, chairman of the Intelligence Committee, who says he never got formal notice of the mining operation. It was an extraordinary reprimand filled with raw language. Goldwater declared the mining is an act violating international law. 'It is an act of war, Bill,' wrote Goldwater. 'How can we back the president's foreign policy when we don't know what the hell he is doing?' Goldwater predicted that the \$21 million the Senate approved last week for Nicaraguan rebels is now doomed. Casey stayed on the Hill more than three hours explaining the Nicaraguan operations to the entire Senate behind closed doors. Afterwards most senators remained indignant over the mining of the harbors and the administration's refusal to acknowledge any World Court action on Central America. DONALD RIEGLE (D-Mich.): Whether Casey understands it, this policy has to be changed. And if it isn't changed, it's likely to take us into a war that no one wants.

COMPTON: On the floor of the Senate support had grown for Senator Edward Kennedy's resolution, a non-binding 'sense of the Congress' resolution, saying the U.S. should take no part of mining operations in Nicaraguan waters. The snowball effect of the last few days has doomed chances that the \$21 million in covert aid to the rebels can ever pass the House. Speaker Tip O'Neill will not even let it come up until after next week's Easter recess. O'Neill displayed his own personal irritation at the president too. The White House claimed it informed him of developments. O'Neill said today, 'That is false.' Anne Compton, ABC News, Capitol Hill.

FLYNN: This is Rita Flynn. President Reagan spent most of the day trying to steer clear of the fury in Congress over Nicaragua. For example, during a meeting with the leader of the Dominican Republic. UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER: Mr. President, will the two of you talk about the mining of Nicaragua's harbors, sir? (inaudible background noises) PRESIDENT REAGAN: No questions in photo opportunities.

Continued

FLYNN: But late today the White House went on the offensive with a statement by the president's spokesman and with the concurrence of Mr. Reagan's top advisers. To charges to contingency plans for a U.S. military invasion of Nicaragua, the statement says, 'We have not planned to use our forces to invade any country in the region.' To reports that the CIA's covert war against Nicaragua is in a holding action to be stepped up should Ronald Reagan win a second term, the White House says, 'This quite simply is not the case.' And to criticisms that Congress has not been fully advised of developments in Central America, a counterattack. 'All U.S. activities in the region have been fully briefed in detail to the committees of the Congress in fully compliance with the law.' The statement characterizes the recent debate as confusing and shrill, and there are indications this is hardly the administration's last word. One senior official today confirmed intelligence reports point to a new, and perhaps more dangerous rebel campaign in Central America. He said it's expected that perhaps as early as this summer Cuba will step up its arms shipments to El Salvador with Nicaragua playing a major role. Rita Flynn, ABC News, at the White House.